Army Rifle Training Criticized

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By Bob Horton
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A civilian research-engineering firm has criticized rifle marksmanship training the Army gives men going into combat.

The Army's procedure "leaves something to be desired," said the report by Arthur D. Little Inc. The firm surveyed the Nation's civilian marksmanship program and its contributions, direct and indirect, to the armed forces.

The Army had requested the survey.

"We were surprised to find that no desired objectives or even minimum standards of rifle marksmanship proficiency have been set for either units or individuals going into combat," the firm reported.

It added:

"The results of our interviews and literature search suggest that due to various compromises (in training time, priorities and personnel) the process of training and selection employed by the military services in preparing units for combat still leaves something to be desired . . . "

The study recommended that the armed forces conduct "needed research," including perhaps making what it called "quality control checks" on the marksmanship proficiency of rifle units going into combat.

The Army says it is puzzled by this criticism. It points out that every man is required to "qualify" with a rifle by reaching a certain standard or target hits.

But a spokesman said the service is considering "whether we can establish a proficiency level for units," as opposed to individuals.

The study said the civilian marksmanship program which last year encompassed 417,576 persons in 5902 gun clubs "contributes significantly" to the proficiency and confidence of potential soldiers.

This is what the Army wanted to know — whether the program is effective.

Policies of the program are set by the National Board for Promotion of Rifle Practice (NBPRP). The office of Director of Civilian Marksmanship (DCM) enrolls clubs and issues arms, ammunition and supplies.

Some congressmen and other critics say these weapons are falling into the hands of extremist groups or other unauthorized personnel.

But the report found "no instances of direct orientation toward any political or extremist activities."

"We found no instances where civic officials linked clubs or club members to criminal or politically extreme elements," the study said. It concluded that club officers, as responsible citizens, can be relied upon to maintain adequate controls over membership and activities.

DCM-affiliated clubs are loaned relatively small numbers of arms, depending on size of their memberships. They buy ammunition from the Army.

Senior clubs, such as colleges, American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars can be loaned four to eight 30-caliber M1 rifles, four 22-caliber rifles or four 45-caliber pistols. They can buy 150 rounds of the larger-caliber ammunition per member, or 300 rounds of 22-caliber ammunition per member.

The study estimated cost of the program last year as $3,670,250. The Army share was $2,667,850, the Navy's $698,700 and the Air Force's $303,700.